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FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1302
INFO RUEHHI/AMEMBASSY HANOI PRIORITY 0917
RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 8/17/16
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [KIRF](#) [VM](#)
SUBJECT: POLICE BRUTALITY RISING; CENTRAL HIGHLANDS DEATH CONFIRMED

CLASSIFIED BY: Seth Winnick, Consul General, HCMC, State.
REASON: 1.4 (d)

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1. (C) On August 7, the Montagnard Foundation issued a press release from the United States reporting that an ethnic minority individual, Y Ngo Adrong, was tortured to death while in police custody in Ea H'leo district of Dak Lak province in the Central Highlands. Two ConGen contacts from the province confirmed the death. Their reporting suggests that Adrong was the victim of police abuse. According to one contact, who was with the family when the police returned the body, there was no bruising around the corpse's neck despite police claims that Adrong had hung himself in his cell. Rather, the corpse reportedly had a large bruise around the stomach indicative of beating. The contact said that police had taken Adrong to a hospital, where he died. Police reportedly kept the body under guard until the burial. According to a second contact, two other persons arrested along with Adrong were released immediately after his death. This contact stated that Adrong was a member of the GVN-recognized Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV) and had no apparent affiliation with separatist groups. Neither of our contacts knew whether Adrong had a cellphone or if he had been in contact with the ethnic minority community in the United States. Since the incident, there has reportedly been heavy security police presence in the village.

2. (C) Separately, SECV pastor Siu Y Kim (strictly protect), a reliable contact in the neighboring Central Highlands province of Gia Lai, reported that eight ethnic minority persons from Chu Se district had been arrested in early August after being caught during an attempt to cross the border to Cambodia. Like many other cross border migrants, Kim said, the eight were young, uneducated, impoverished, frustrated with the local environment and influenced by "Dega activists in the United States" to flee. Kim reports that these eight have been in custody for the past two weeks. Although he has not seen the individuals personally, his contacts report that they have been beaten.

3. (C) Similarly, contacts in the SECV in the Central Highlands province of Dak Nong report that six members of the church also have been in police custody for two weeks, and reportedly have been beaten. The six are being questioned about their communications with ethnic minority individuals in the United States. A seventh ethnic minority individual, the son of the head of the SECV in the province, is also being questioned but is not being held. The police are also questioning the group about their role in facilitating the transfer of funds from the United States to ethnic minority families. While acknowledging that at least one member of the group acted as a conduit for the transfers, our SECV contact stated that it was a humanitarian act to help others in the community and had no connection to ethnic minority separatism.

¶4. (SBU) Reports of recent police beatings are not restricted to the Central Highlands. One HCMC-based political activist told us that police had hit him in the neck and head during a recent interrogation over his role in the "8406 Block" dissident group.

A house church leader also reported to us recently that in late July, a local policeman assaulted the leader of a house church congregation in a rural village in Phu Yen province in central Vietnam.

¶5. (C) Comment: During HCMC Poloff's Washington consultations in early July, Vietnamese Embassy officials stated that the GVN had credible information that the Montagnard Foundation had instructed its members in the Central Highlands to organize protests in advance of the PNTR debate in Congress and the President's November visit. HCMC-based dissidents are also encountering stiffer police push back to their activities (more septel). Whatever the pretext, there appears to be a sharp rise in police violence against perceived opponents. End Comment.

WINNICK